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SUBJECT: KOSOVO WEEKLY: DS HITS BACK AT DSS RHETORIC

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Democratic Party (DS) responded to the Democratic Party of Serbia's (DSS) NATO-bashing and inflammatory comments about Serbian "use of force" or "severe measures" in Kosovo. Serbian media covered the U.S. and EU's reactions to the latest DSS rhetoric, which included a Kosovo Ministry official asserting that a Kosovo unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) would annul the 1999 Kumanovo Agreement and allow for a return of Serbian forces to Kosovo. In high-level meetings at the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, we expressed USG concern about these inflammatory public statements. The MOD and MFA confirmed that the KosMin official's remarks did not represent Government views. End Summary.

GOS STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITY

¶2. (SBU) DSS officials, including the party spokesperson and several ministers, continued to raise the specter of a UDI by Pristina after December 10. The DSS' inflammatory rhetoric culminated in public comments by Kosovo Ministry official Dusan Prorokovic that Serbia is "ready to use force to prevent the West from recognizing Kosovo's independence." In a September 5 International Herald Tribune article that received major attention in Serbia, Prorokovic made the most explicit threats yet by a GOS official saying that Belgrade could legally send forces back to Kosovo and close Kosovo's borders, among other options, if Pristina declares independence. Prorokovic cited the 1999 Kumanovo Agreement as the legal basis preventing such moves now but said Pristina's UDI would void the agreement. Prorokovic said, "Without Kumanovo our army can go back without any legal limits. It can cross the boundary and go everywhere in Kosovo without any legal problems." Prorokovic reiterated that the GOS considers continued talks on Kosovo status the only desirable option.

¶3. (SBU) For the first time since the DS-DSS coalition government formed in May 2007, DS officials directly criticized the DSS over Kosovo policy. In the September 6 Financial Times, Foreign Minister Jeremic contradicted Prorokovic and said that Serbia will not threaten military action in Kosovo. Jeremic stressed that while a UDI would destabilize the region, Serbia would not contribute to the province's destabilization with either physical, military or security measures. Jeremic said, "All legal, diplomatic and practical means will be used to show that we do not accept the proclamation of independence and that it is void."

¶4. (SBU) On September 6, Sutanovac said that the statements made by some Serbian ministers about NATO did not represent the position of the Serbian government, and assessed that they were politically motivated. "Those who say they are in favor of entry into the EU and against cooperation with NATO should know that, lately, not a single state has entered the EU without first becoming a member of NATO," Sutanovac underscored that the army and the Defense Ministry had established a high degree of cooperation with NATO. Sutanovac assessed that it was in the highest interest of Serbians who live in Kosovo that the Serbian Army has excellent cooperation with KFOR.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy officers met with the Minister of Defense on

September 7 to express USG concern over the inflammatory pronouncements of State Secretary Prorokovic and our appreciation of the Defense Minister's public remarks to counter Prorokovic's threats. The Minister told us (and the media) that Prorokovic did not speak for the GOS, nor control Serbia's troop movements or foreign policy. "As long as I head the Ministry of Defense, no troops will be sent to Kosovo," he told us. The minister characterized Prorokovic's remarks as a message for domestic consumption, laying a marker to establish blame if/when "things go badly." He accepted our point that the international community and press make no such distinctions. Sutanovac told us that he had received a flood of messages supporting his public statements. We added our encouragement for more of the same, if necessary. Sutanovac emphasized his commitment to advancing his ministry's relationship with NATO and the West.

¶6. (SBU) Embassy officers also met with Borislav Stefanovic, the new Political Director at the MFA, to register USG concerns. Stefanovic referred to FM Jeremic's statement and assured us that the GOS is committed to engaging constructively to find a diplomatic and political solution to the Kosovo issue. He added that the MFA had received a message from its Embassy in Washington expressing USG concerns on this issue. Stefanovic emphasized that the MFA would work within the GOS to try to avoid such comments in the future. He stressed, however, that these are difficult times for Serbia and that he and others would try to be the "guardians of the right views" of the GOS to the international community.

¶7. (U) President Tadic has not yet joined his ministers in responding to DSS rhetoric. This week, he reiterated arguments against Kosovo independence and lauded Russia's support for Serbia's position. In an interview with the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS, Tadic said Kosovo is not ready to become an independent state because "right now it is impossible to create in Kosovo a modern society capable of respecting human rights, including those of

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citizens of non-Albanian descent." He added that using the threat of violence as an argument to support independence is "absolutely unacceptable" and that any state created as a result would lead to long-term instability in the region. Tadic blamed "outside support for Albanian separatism" for raising the expectations within Kosovo for independence. Tadic spoke of Russia's key support for Serbia and said that "for centuries...even in the most difficult circumstances, Russia protected Serbia.

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

¶8. (SBU) Sweden: According to local contacts, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt told PM Kostunica that NATO-bashing and the PM's threats against countries that recognize Kosovo were "unhelpful."

¶9. (U) UK & France: Belgrade daily Blic carried on September 7 an op-ed written by the Foreign Ministers of France and the UK, Bernard Kouchner and David Miliband, in which they stated that France and the UK want Serbia in the EU as it is of crucial importance for the future of the region but that it is difficult to imagine Serbia in the EU without the Kosovo status issue being resolved first. The ministers also write that both sides should be constructive in the negotiating process. "If Belgrade cannot accept Ahtisaari's plan, then it has responsibility to propose an alternative which would also be acceptable to Kosovo," the ministers write according to the daily.

¶10. (U) EU: Cristina Gallach, spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, said on September 6 that recent "inflammatory vocabulary" from Belgrade on Kosovo did not respect the agreement reached by representatives of Serbia and the Kosovo Albanians. Gallach said that the Serbian officials "violated the agreement less than a week" after the August 30 meeting in Vienna.

¶11. (U) NATO: Serbian media conveyed NATO spokesman James Apaturai statements that claims that NATO wants to create a state through an independent Kosovo are "senseless because NATO does not, cannot and does not want to create states". He added these claims are purely

political, unnecessary and undesirable from NATO's point of view.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: The DS took an important step forward this week by finally standing up to the DSS on its inflammatory Kosovo pronouncements. We will continue to encourage the generally risk-averse DS leaders to counter (or better, prevent) remarks that justify the use of force in Kosovo or otherwise undermine GOS commitments to finding a diplomatic solution to Kosovo status.

MUNTER